



**UNIVERSITY  
OF TURKU**

# **MULTICULTURALISM IN FINNISH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC): AN OVERVIEW**

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## **Bachelor's thesis**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This review explores the state of multiculturalism in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), highlighting the growing importance of inclusive practices in response to increasing cultural and linguistic diversity. Drawing on national frameworks such as the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2016), educators are encouraged to integrate multicultural perspectives into daily practices, supporting both the development of children's self-identity and appreciation of others. Methodologically, the review employed a comprehensive literature search using databases like Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar, with inclusion criteria focusing on peer-reviewed English-language studies addressing multiculturalism within Finnish ECEC. Both theoretical and empirical research were included to capture a holistic picture of current practices. The review synthesizes findings from seven key studies published between 2010 and 2021, examining policies, challenges, and strategies associated with implementing multicultural education in Finnish preschools. While policy frameworks generally support multicultural inclusion, implementation gaps persist, often linked to educators' varying levels of cultural competence and experience. Language barriers, implicit biases, and culturally narrow curricula are among the challenges identified in creating inclusive learning environments. The importance of professional development, such as the Subject Teacher Education Program (STEP), is emphasized to strengthen educators' multicultural competencies. The findings inform future research and practice by identifying effective strategies such as participatory action approaches, intertextual art methods, and dialogic teaching practices. These efforts are essential in preparing children to navigate and contribute positively to a globalized, multicultural society.

**Key words:** multicultural education, early childhood education, Finnish ECEC

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## 1 BACKGROUND

Dolce (1973) defines multiculturalism as, “a reflection of a value system which emphasizes acceptance of behavioural differences deriving from differing cultural systems and an active support of the right of such differences to exist” (p. 283). Meanwhile, multicultural education refers to educational approach to address cultural diversity and to create inclusive society (Lee, Cha & Ham, 2023). Multiculturalism in Finnish’s Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has gained increasing importance in recent years, as Finland’s society becomes more diverse (Millei, 2019). The global migration trends, combined with the country’s commitment to social equality, have led to an expanding population of children with various cultural backgrounds in early childhood settings. Finnish ECEC is grounded in the belief that every child, regardless of their background, should be given equal opportunities to thrive (Räisänen, 2020). This philosophy reflects Finland's broader commitment to educational equity and the integration of multicultural values in its educational policies and practices. The ability of ECEC professionals to support and respect cultural differences has become a fundamental aspect of effective pedagogy and care in Finland.

The Finnish curriculum framework, The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2016), emphasizes the significance of recognizing and valuing diversity, fostering inclusive environments, and promoting intercultural understanding. It acknowledges the role of educators in helping children develop both a positive sense of self-identity and an appreciation for others' cultural backgrounds. Multicultural education in Finland is not only about understanding different cultures but also about breaking down stereotypes, combating prejudice, and promoting social cohesion (Paatela-Niemi et al., 2019). Early childhood educators are thus encouraged to integrate multicultural perspectives into all areas of learning and development, from language acquisition to social interaction.

Despite these policies and frameworks, challenges persist in the implementation of multicultural practices in Finnish ECEC. A study by Hämäläinen et al. (2021) found that while many educators express a strong commitment to inclusivity, their ability to engage effectively with multicultural children often depends on their personal experiences and professional development opportunities. For example, educators with limited exposure to diversity may struggle to create environments that fully support the cultural needs of children from migrant backgrounds. Therefore, there is a growing emphasis on providing targeted training for educators to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to address the complex dynamics of multicultural classrooms. The goal is not only to accommodate diversity

but to actively promote an intercultural dialogue that prepares children to thrive in a globalized society.

### **1.1 Definition of multiculturalism**

From the historical perspective the term ‘multiculturalism’ began to use at the end of 19th century. Beginning of the 20th century, the term ‘multiculturalism’ gets popular as societies became more diverse due to globalization, immigration, and colonial histories. In countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, multiculturalism emerged as a state policy aimed at recognizing and promoting the cultural diversity of their populations (Kymlicka, 1995). Multicultural policies seek to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all cultural groups, while fostering mutual respect and coexistence (Taylor, 1994). Although multiculturalism as a concept is well accepted in principle by many societies but the implementation of multiculturalism has been argued and facing challenges and difficulties to enrich national identities and improve social cohesion (Modood, 2007). This ongoing debate reflects the maturity of society and willingness to accommodate and create equal society, not only in the economy, politics but in education too.

Generally, the word ‘multiculturalism’ refers to the coexistence of diverse cultures within a society, where cultural differences are acknowledged, respected, and celebrated’ (Arasaratnam, 2013). According to Oxford Dictionary (accessed, 2025) “the presence of, or support for the presence of, several distinct cultural or ethnic groups within a society”. It encompasses the idea that various cultural groups can maintain their unique identities while contributing to the larger social framework. According to Kymlicka (2007), multiculturalism promotes equal rights for minority groups and recognizes the importance of cultural diversity in building a more inclusive society. It is not just about the acceptance of diversity but also about ensuring that all cultural groups can thrive. Multiculturalism has been embraced in various countries to foster social cohesion and enhance national identity by recognizing the value of pluralism (Taylor, 1992). However, it also faces challenges, particularly around issues of integration and the potential for social fragmentation (Modood, 2007). These challenges also prominent in education, from policy making to implementation.

## 1.2 Multiculturalism in education related issues in classroom

Multiculturalism in education promotes inclusivity and recognizes the diverse cultural backgrounds of students, emphasizing the importance of creating a learning environment that reflects and respects cultural differences. By integrating multicultural perspectives into the curriculum, educators aim to foster a sense of belonging and understanding among students from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Banks, 2008). This approach not only enriches students' educational experiences but also helps combat stereotypes and biases, promoting social cohesion in increasingly diverse societies (Gay, 2010). Additionally, multicultural education encourages critical thinking and prepares students to navigate and contribute positively to a globalized world (Nieto, 2010). Ultimately, embracing multiculturalism in education is seen as a powerful tool for equity, enhancing both academic and social outcomes for all students. However, it also faces many challenges in a classroom setting.

One of the foremost challenges is the ability to foster cultural sensitivity and awareness in kindergarten and schools. Educators may struggle to understand the cultural norms, values, and expectations of their students. This can lead to unintentional biases or misunderstandings, particularly when students' behaviour or learning styles are shaped by their cultural backgrounds or identity (Gay, 2018). Therefore, teachers' training and professional development should emphasize on teacher's ability to understand cultural dynamics and avoid perpetuating stereotypes or bias.

Secondly, language differences can be another significant barrier or challenge. Students who speak English or Finnish in this context as a second language (ESL) may find it difficult to fully participate in class activities, understand instructions, or engage with native language speaking children. This can lead to children's feelings of isolation and a lack of commitment or engagement towards classroom activities (Cummins, 2001). Thus, teacher's empowerment must focus on teaching methods and materials that accommodate to non-Finnish speaking children until they adjusted well in a classroom environment using strategies such as visual aids, and simplified language as a step forward.

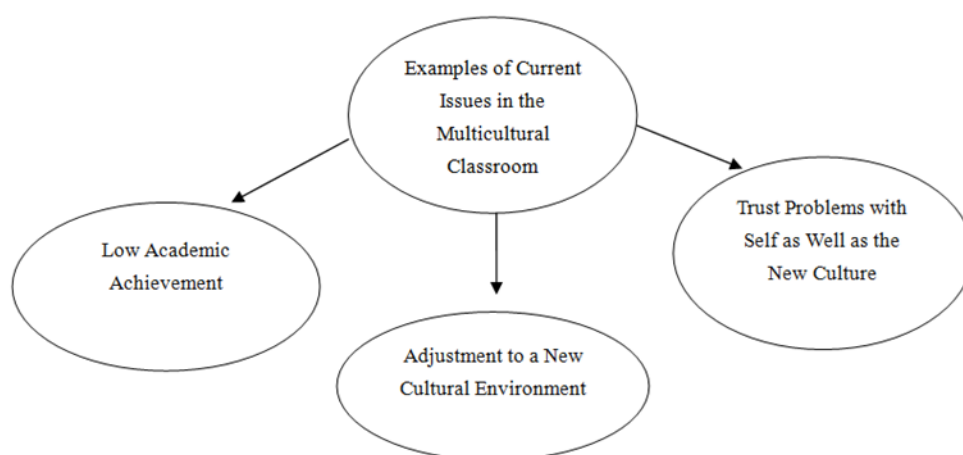
Thirdly, schools need to design a pre-school curriculum that reflects the diverse cultural backgrounds of all children, but this can be a major challenge. A curriculum that predominantly reflects one culture (e.g. Finnish culture) or viewpoint may alienate students from different backgrounds (Banks, 2008). Therefore, multicultural education curriculum

design and implementation require integration of diverse perspectives into the teaching syllabus, ensuring that students can see their own cultures represented while also learning about others.

Fourthly, differences in cultural values and norms can sometimes lead to misunderstanding or tensions in the classroom. For instance, children from collectivist cultures may have different expectations around group activities and individual performance compared to those from individualistic cultures (Ho, 2008). Providing skills to teachers can foster an inclusive environment where all children feel esteemed and valued irrespective of one's cultural background.

Fifth point, teachers' expectations of children's performance can be influenced by their own cultural background and biases. Implicit biases about children from different religion, racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups can affect their perceptions of children's abilities, which in turn can influence how they teach or engage with them. These biases may lead to lower expectations for certain groups of students, which can undermine their educational outcomes and academic achievement (Ferguson, 2003).

Below is an example of possible issues in the multicultural classroom proposed by Md. Rana Parvez (2019).



Source: Multiculturalism Issue in Classroom (Md. Rana Parvez. (2019).

### **1.3 Multiculturalism in Early Childhood Education**

Globally, the emphasis on multiculturalism in early childhood education getting popular and more importance were given in implementing such policy in the national education system, including in Finland. Multiculturalism in early childhood education is key for promoting inclusivity, national building, tolerance, and cultivate respect among children. By integrating diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum, teachers can help children develop a broader understanding of the world around them, fostering an environment that values differences. Research suggests that when children are exposed to various cultures, they are more likely to appreciate diversity and develop critical thinking skills (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Incorporating multiculturalism in early childhood education not only enriches the learning experience but also prepares children for a globalized society, where cross-cultural communication and understanding are vital for national building.

### **1.4 Finnish's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)**

Finland's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system is internationally recognized for its high-quality, equitable approach to early childhood learning. The Finnish ECEC framework focuses on fostering children's holistic development, prioritizing social, emotional, cognitive, and physical growth through a child-centred, play-based curriculum (Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2012). One key feature of the system is its commitment to accessibility, ensuring that all children, regardless of their background, have access to high-quality early education (Albrecht et al., 2019). Furthermore, Finnish ECEC places significant importance on the qualifications of educators, with all teachers required to hold a degree in early childhood education, ensuring a highly professional and competent workforce (OECD, 2020). This combination of accessibility, professional development, and a child-focused approach has made Finland's system a model for other countries seeking to improve their early education frameworks.

## 1.5 Review aims and research questions

Multiculturalism has become an essential component of early childhood education and care (ECEC), particularly in societies experiencing increasing cultural and linguistic diversity. In Finland, where education policies emphasize equity and inclusion, the integration of multicultural perspectives within ECEC settings plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging among children from diverse backgrounds (Finnish National Agency for Education, Year). However, the implementation of multicultural education presents both opportunities and challenges for educators, policymakers, and institutions. (Alisaari et al., 2011)

This narrative review aims to synthesize existing literature on multiculturalism in Finnish ECEC, with a focus on understanding current practices, policies, and strategies that promote diversity and inclusion. By examining the challenges and limitations in implementing multicultural education, this review seeks to identify gaps in research and highlight positive approaches that can enhance multicultural practices in Finnish early childhood settings.

The following research questions guide this review:

1. What is the status of research on multiculturalism in Finnish early childhood education and care?
2. Which policies and practices influence the development of multiculturalism in Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC)?
3. What are the challenges and limitations of implementing multiculturalism in Finnish early childhood education and care?
4. Which strategies have demonstrated efficacy in promoting multiculturalism in Finnish early childhood education and care? The remainder of the sentence is: "These questions are important to consider in order to create inclusive and equitable learning environments for all children."

## 2 METHOD

This narrative review was conducted across various electronic databases to identify relevant studies for inclusion in this review. Databases such as PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were used. Additional sources were also searched through reference lists from included research articles and gray literature. The search focuses on peer-reviewed journals, articles, policy documents, and related research materials to ensure relevance to contemporary Finnish ECEC practices. The search settings included specific keywords related to ECEC in Finland; (a) "Multiculturalism" AND "Early Childhood Education" AND "Finland" (b) "Cultural diversity" AND "Preschool education" AND "Finnish ECEC", (c) "Inclusion policies" AND "ECEC" AND "multicultural practices" The use of Boolean operators, specifically AND and OR, was used to enhance the precision of search lists of pertinent articles that were systematically examined for supplementary sources.

The inclusion criteria were (a) research article published in the English language (b) The article focus into the topics of multiculturalism within Finnish early childhood education and care (c) research article examining the policies, practices, challenges, or strategies related to multiculturalism in Finnish preschools, and (d) Critical and empirical approaches (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) and pertinent policy documents. Meanwhile the exclusion criteria were, (a) studies that did not focus on multiculturalism in Finnish preschools or outside Finland, (b) articles that are not pertaining to early childhood education, (c) article that have not undergone peer review (unless considered pertinent gray literature). Next step, the selection of studies was conducted through a three-stage process, (a) identification; Initial search results were compiled, and duplicates were removed, (b) Screening; the titles and abstracts underwent a review process in accordance with established inclusion and exclusion criteria, (c) Eligibility and inclusion; The final stage involved the assessment of the full text of selected articles to determine eligibility, and studies meeting the criteria were incorporated into the final review.

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Description of Included Studies

A total of seven (7) articles published between 2010 and 2021 that examined multiculturalism in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) were identified and included in this review. Most of these articles critically discuss multicultural education from a theoretical or policy perspective, without presenting original empirical research—for example, Ojala (2010), Paavola & Pesonen (2021), Holm & Mansikka (2013), and Millei (2019). Two (2) studies, however, incorporated original data in their analysis: Arvola et al. (2017) and Lastikka & Lipponen (2016). Of these, only Arvola et al. (2017) reported using inferential statistical analysis, while Lastikka & Lipponen (2016) relied solely on qualitative data. Paavola & Pesonen (2021) employed critical discourse analysis to examine ECEC policies in Finland, and Holm & Mansikka (2013) provided a theoretical perspective on multicultural education. Table 1 presents the general characteristics of the articles included in this review. Nearly all the studies addressed issues related to multicultural education in Finland, highlighting current challenges and offering recommendations for future improvement. Several studies emphasized the need for teacher training and the renewal of educator competencies in multicultural education (Dervin et al., 2021; Millei, 2019). One such initiative is the Subject Teacher Education Program (STEP), which aims to enhance educators' multicultural competencies (Dervin et al., 2021).

All the included studies provided recommendations for improving multicultural education. These include the use of intertextual art methods (Dervin et al., 2021), interactive group activities with meaningful content (Ojala, 2010), participatory action approaches (Arvola et al., 2017), and fostering dialogue (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016).

Table 2 summarizes the focus, key findings, and recommendations of each article reviewed. Present review effectively highlights key themes such as teacher training, policy analysis, and pedagogical strategies. For example, other researchers (Dervin et al., 2021; Millei, 2019; Ojala, 2010) found that teacher training is essential to improve multicultural competencies, while policy analysis can reveal gaps in current educational frameworks. Meanwhile, pedagogical strategies like participatory action approaches (Arvola et al., 2017) and encouraging dialogue (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016).

**Table 1: Characteristics of Included Studies**

<b>Study</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Year Published</b>	<b>Objective(s)</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Approach</b>
1	Dervin et al.	2012	(1) to discuss on multicultural education and, (2) concept of intercultural competencies in Finland	Qualitative	This article includes perception or viewpoints of 20 students of Subject Teacher Education Program (STEP), University of Helsinki.
2	Ojala	2010	(1) to discuss a need for inclusive early childhood education and (2) Presenting some key findings from the development of multicultural curriculum education at Finnish preschools.	Case study	Discussion and examining the development of multicultural curriculum education in Finland e.g. ongoing European Union project INCLUD-ED, experiment in Finnish education system.
3	Paavola & Pesonen	2021	To examine diversity in construction of Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care.	Policy analysis	Using critical multicultural theory with Critical Discourse Analysis
4	Holm & Mansikka	2013	(1) To discuss praxis and policy on multicultural education in Finland and (2) How supportive laws and policies toward Early Childhood Education.	Theoretical	This article uses discourse analysis of the rhetorical policy level including the national curriculum and also comparing research finding about students' experience on multicultural education.
5	Arvola et al.	2017	(1) to explore immigrant student's participation as a strategy to develop effective pedagogical approach in the Finnish Early Childhood Education classroom and, (2) Which daily activity will increase student's participation	Mixed method	This original research involves a total 316 (178 boys and 134 girls), immigrant children and 71 of them are special needs. In this large observational study, participatory action was analysed to understand children involvement in the Finnish ECE setting.
6	Lastikka & Lipponen	2016	To understand immigrant family's perspective on Early Childhood Education	Qualitative (small case study in a day care centre)	Interview with 13 immigrant parents from countries Kosovo, Somalia, Russia, Bangladesh, Iraq, Estonia

			Curriculum (ECEC) in practice.		and Finland-Thailand spouse. Eight of them are Islam, 3 parents are orthodox and 2 not stated their religion.
7	Millei	2019		Ethnographic	Scholarly critical discussion on the current state of ECEC in Finland.

**Table 2: Key findings, Highlight and Recommendation**

<b>Study</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>Other Highlights</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
1	Dervin et al	2012	Intercultural Competences in ECEC	Highlights the need for renewed competencies among educators. STEP group students and go beyond their own cultural	Educational programs such as Subject Teacher Education Program (STEP) are good platforms to encourage intercultural discussion. Art Education can be a good example to promote and intercultural education	It is very important to learn from people from different cultural backgrounds. Intertextual art method enhances understanding and creating plurities, interculturality, intermedial and intersubjectively.
2	Ojala	2010	Developing multicultural ECEC	Multiculturalism in Early Childhood Education gives opportunities to children from different countries to work together. Promote gender equality. Involve more adults in the classroom to enhance learning Mix gender and various ethnic background students Mix students from different academic levels or achievement Personalize individuality in helping students Prescript targeted curriculum Also focus on special needs students to work with teachers. Inclusion in teaching practice High expectations from both teachers and parents.	Emphases on Two (2) national guidelines on Finnish early childhood education  (1) Finnish National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in 2004 and,  (2) ECE is the Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education (ECE) by National Board of Education in the year 2000.	Explores cultural responsiveness in Finnish preschools Only accept top performing students into the Early Childhood Teaching Program. Develop comprehensive inclusive school practice in Finland like Spain. Promote interactive groups in the classroom. Development of ECE activities should incorporate elements; (1) values, (2) learning environment, (3) support of children's growth and development, and (4) cooperation and support for parents.
3	Paavola & Pesonen	2021	Diversity discourses in curriculum	Manage to examine multicultural elements in the Finnish Core Curriculum	Need to be mindful, institutional language can cause systematic inequalities Questions arise about teachers' intercultural competencies.	Respect for cultural diversity is a crucial dimension in the implementation of multicultural education in Finnish Early Childhood Education.

						Policy that promotes inclusion education and eradication of discrimination. Future progress of multicultural education in Finland based on social justice.
4	Holm & Mansikka	2013	Multicultural policy and praxis	Critiques Finland's policy approach to multicultural education Laws and policies not always supportive as being portrayed in practice.	Compare with other countries, migrant students' academic performance are less than Finnish ethnicity students. Although teachers in Finland are well educated with master's degrees but are not well prepared to face multicultural challenges. Social and cultural status as a barrier in implementing multicultural education Poor academic performance among native children e.g. Roma children	Need to review the definition of multicultural in Education clearly because the current definition is too narrow. Include the majority population (Finnish People) in new integration law (Integration Act 1386/2010) because the current integration more refers to immigrants than the majority population. Need to increase hermeneutical sensitivity in Finnish Education. A good education system should minimize stereotypes and prejudicial thinking among both majority and minority students.
5	Arvola et al.	2017	Immigrant children's participation	Investigates barriers to inclusion in ECEC participatory action is important to increase children's involvement in the ECE classroom. High correlation between participation and children's involvement in classroom, whereby increasing children's attention, concentration, sustained active activities and mental engagement.	Role play is a key method to increase classroom participation and positively correlates with student's involvement in classroom. Peer relationships play an important role in student's participation.	Teachers should plan and increase daily meaningful activities to increase students' participation in Finnish ECE settings. To further increase children's and family's participation in ECE learning needs a more proactive and effective approach.

6	Lastikka & Lipponen	2016	Immigrant parents perspectives	Documents challenges faced by immigrant families in Finnish ECEC Need for fostering dialogs and mutual understanding Enhance cultural and language understanding Promote cooperation and teamwork Provide support and personalized assistance.	Immigrant parents show satisfactions about their children's' learning and development. Good cooperation between educators and parents promotes children's well-being.	Educators develop partnership between them and immigrant parents. Promote 2-way dialogues between educator and immigrant parents Power sharing in the multicultural education of ECEC. Emphases on caring and empowering the immigrant parents
7	Millei	2019	Re-orienting diversity in ECEC	Examined how educators react to diversity Emphases on diversity and inclusion in ECEC and preschool teaching and learning. Celebrating other cultures, increasing commonality and which based on equality in discussion.	Build Finnish national identity based on plurality.	Calling for more research work on multiculturalism, inter-cultures, and multilingualism, Identify and recognize differences and work together to create more inclusion ECEC program. Policy makers should find ways to include and enhance equality in ECEC education as a main agenda. Professional working in ECEC should minimize differentiating and categorizing children and family based on ethnicity

### **3.2 What is the present status of research about multiculturalism in Finnish early childhood education and care?**

The study of multiculturalism in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has developed as a result of rising immigration and shifting demographics. Multicultural education is still a fairly recent area in Finnish early childhood education and care, and there isn't a universally accepted method, resulting in different practices among institutions (Dervin et al., 2012). Researchers highlight the importance for teachers to cultivate intercultural skills that go beyond mere cultural awareness, encouraging a critical and reflective approach in their teaching methods (Dervin et al., 2012). The Finnish National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018) includes goals for equity, inclusion, and diversity, but how these are understood can vary among educators, leading to uneven implementation (Paavola & Pesonen, 2021). Moreover, research shows that there are no national guidelines for incorporating immigrant children into early childhood education and care, which can result in parents feeling alienated from the educational system (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016). Even with forward-thinking policies in place, there are still hurdles in putting them into action, largely because of insufficient teacher training and differing degrees of dedication to multicultural education within institutions (Holm & Mansikka, 2013).

### **3.3 What policies and practices guide the development of multiculturalism in Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC)?**

In Finland, various policies and practices shape the approach to multiculturalism in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018) highlights the importance of diversity, inclusion, and equity, promoting multilingual support and culturally aware teaching methods. This curriculum acts as a national guideline, directing the delivery and advancement of early childhood education and care to ensure high-quality and equitable services throughout the nation (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018).

The Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014) guarantees that early childhood education and care institutions offer equal opportunities to every child, no matter their ethnicity or language background. The Act seeks to foster equality and combat discrimination, providing stronger legal safeguards for individuals who have faced discrimination (Ministry of Justice, Finland, 2014).

Furthermore, projects such as INCLUD-ED encourage inclusive approaches, including diverse grouping, collaborative learning, and tailored support for a variety of learners. The goal of these approaches is to promote integration and avoid segregation in educational environments (Ojala, 2010).

Policies promote the integration of intercultural training within teacher education programs. Nonetheless, research shows that numerous educators continue to feel ill-equipped to teach in diverse classrooms, pointing out a disconnect between policy goals and actual readiness (Holm & Mansikka, 2013).

Additionally, promoting teamwork with immigrant families is an important policy emphasis. Many parents still feel left out of decision-making processes, indicating that strategies for engaging them effectively are not always put into practice (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016).

### **3.4 What are the challenges and limitations of the implementation of multiculturalism in Finnish early childhood education and care?**

Finnish society has often seen itself as culturally uniform, which complicates the acceptance of multiculturalism. There isn't a widely recognized framework, leading to varying approaches to diversity in early childhood education settings. Many educators do not have the necessary training and resources to effectively promote multicultural education, which can unintentionally result in the exclusion of cultural diversity. Although policies encourage multilingualism, putting this into practice is challenging, and immigrant children frequently lack adequate language support in preschools. Additionally, many immigrant parents find it difficult to navigate the Finnish education system and feel disconnected from the decision-making processes in education.

### 3.5 Which strategies have demonstrated efficacy?

According to the literature reviewed, various strategies have shown effectiveness in fostering multiculturalism in early childhood education in Finland

- a) **Improving Intercultural Skills.** Transitioning from a focus on knowledge to a more critical approach in intercultural competencies enables educators to confront stereotypes and embrace inclusive teaching methods (Dervin et al., 2012). Improving Teacher Education: Including multicultural training in teacher education programs can enhance educators' readiness to engage with diverse student groups (Holm & Mansikka, 2013).
- b) **Creating Inclusive Learning Spaces.** The INCLUD-ED Project has demonstrated that bringing together children from various backgrounds encourages integration and helps avoid segregation (Ojala, 2010).
- c) **Engaging with immigrant parents** through open communication encourages their involvement and builds a foundation of mutual understanding (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016).
- d) **Encouraging Role Play and Peer Interaction.** Research shows that organized play activities, especially role play, greatly improve immigrant children's engagement and feeling of inclusion in early childhood education and care environments (Arvola et al., 2017).
- e) **Enhancing Policy Implementation.** To maintain consistency, it's important to convert policies into practical guidelines for educators and school leaders (Paavola & Pesonen, 2021).

## **4 DISCUSSIONS**

### **4.1 Key findings**

#### **Characteristics of Included Studies**

The research on multiculturalism in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) includes studies that analyse national policies, curriculum frameworks, teacher perspectives, and immigrant family experiences. Key studies highlight the growing need for inclusive pedagogies, culturally responsive teaching methods, and the role of social integration in ECEC settings (Ojala, 2010).

#### **Present Status of Research on Multiculturalism in Finnish ECEC**

Multiculturalism in Finnish ECEC is relatively new but has gained prominence due to increased immigration. Policies emphasize equity and inclusion, but challenges persist in practice. While Finland has a robust legislative framework supporting multicultural education, implementation varies across regions. Teachers often lack sufficient training in intercultural education, leading to gaps in practice (Holm & Mansikka, 2013).

Recent research emphasizes the importance of children's participation in decision-making and social interaction to foster inclusion. However, studies indicate that immigrant children face challenges in fully engaging due to language barriers and cultural differences (Arvola et al., 2017).

#### **Policies and Practices Guiding Multiculturalism in Finnish ECEC**

The **Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2016)** promotes cultural diversity as a resource, aiming for equity and participation (Paavola & Pesonen, 2021). Policies also emphasize the importance of mother tongue education, bilingual pedagogy, and supporting immigrant families through tailored educational interventions.

However, studies reveal that while policy frameworks advocate for inclusivity, practical implementation often falls short due to systemic challenges such as lack of culturally responsive teacher training and limited parental engagement strategies (Paavola & Pesonen, 2021).

## Challenges and Limitations in Implementing Multiculturalism in Finnish ECEC

- a) **Teacher Preparation Deficit.** Many teachers report feeling unprepared to handle cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms. The lack of structured intercultural education in teacher training programs exacerbates this issue (Holm & Mansikka, 2013).
- b) **Parental Involvement Barriers.** Immigrant parents often struggle to engage with Finnish ECEC due to language barriers, unfamiliarity with the system, and cultural differences in parenting and education approaches (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016).
- c) **Structural and Social Exclusion.** Despite Finland's strong emphasis on equity, disparities remain in how immigrant children experience inclusion, particularly in urban centres where multicultural populations are growing (Arvola et al., 2017).

## Effective Strategies for Promoting Multiculturalism in Finnish ECEC

- a) **Children's Participation and Agency.** Research suggests that encouraging immigrant children's active participation in everyday activities fosters inclusion and social integration. Role-playing and peer interactions have been found to be effective strategies (Arvola et al., 2017).
- b) **Bilingual and Bicultural Approaches.** Providing opportunities for children to use their mother tongue while integrating Finnish language learning enhances engagement and learning outcomes (Paavola & Pesonen, 2021).
- c) **Teacher Training in Intercultural Competence.** Programs focusing on equipping educators with knowledge of multicultural teaching methods and intercultural communication skills help bridge gaps between policy and practice (Ojala, 2010).
- d) **Parental Engagement Initiatives.** Strengthening communication channels between ECEC institutions and immigrant parents can improve trust and cooperation, leading to better educational outcomes (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016).

These findings indicate that while Finland has made significant progress in integrating multiculturalism in early childhood education, systemic barriers still hinder its full realization. More targeted interventions and training programs for educators, alongside inclusive curriculum development, are necessary for achieving long-term success in multicultural ECEC.

## **4.2 Implications**

This study shows that Finnish Early Childhood Teaching and Care (ECEC) needs institutional adjustments to integrate intercultural teaching. Despite progress in diversity promotion, Finland still struggles to connect policy and practice. National policies must stop viewing multiculturalism only through the perspective of immigrants. Finnish society should embrace variety (Paavola & Pesonen, 2021). To prepare teachers to establish inclusive learning environments, teacher education programs should include comprehensive intercultural competency training and professional growth (Millei, 2019). Multilingual communication methods and culturally sensitive outreach should also improve parents' involvement in children's education (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016). To make diverse students feel included and involved in learning, curriculum creation should clearly embrace multicultural viewpoints (Holm & Mansikka, 2013). Without these fundamental changes, Finland risks perpetuating an education system that marginalizes children from varied cultural backgrounds despite its equity pledge.

## **4.3 Strengths and Limitations**

Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) needs institutional changes to integrate intercultural training, according to this study. Finland struggles to link policy and practice despite diversity promotion efforts. National policies must stop viewing multiculturalism through immigrants' eyes. Variety should be welcomed in Finland (Paavola & Pesonen, 2021). Teacher education programs should integrate intercultural competency training and professional development to educate teachers to create inclusive learning environments (Millei, 2019). Multilingual communication and culturally sensitive outreach should also increase parental involvement in school (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016). Curriculum should clearly reflect multicultural perspectives to incorporate and engage various students (Holm & Mansikka, 2013). Despite its fairness vow, Finland risks sustaining an education system that marginalizes children from many cultural backgrounds without these significant adjustments.

#### **4.4 Future recommendations**

Strategic steps are needed to strengthen multicultural education in Finnish ECEC. First, teacher education programs should require intercultural competence training to prepare teachers to provide inclusive learning environments (Holm & Mansikka, 2013). Culturally relevant teaching practices should be supported by ongoing professional development (Millei, 2019). Second, local authorities should better enforce national multicultural education regulations to provide consistency across all ECEC institutions (Paavola & Pesonen, 2021). Multilingual resources, interpreting services, and community engagement programs can also help immigrant families participate in their children's schooling (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016). Finally, changing the national curriculum to explicitly specify multicultural education tactics for daily teaching would standardize ECEC approaches (Ojala, 2010). These proposals can help Finland establish a more inclusive early childhood education system that supports varied cultural backgrounds.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is aiming to improve multiculturalism through several strategies. Firstly, a compulsory, continuous professional development program for teachers should be implemented, emphasizing multicultural education, inclusive teaching practices, and cultural sensitivity. This program should be updated periodically to reflect globalization, demographic shifts, and best practices changes. Teachers' training on multiculturalism can be further enhanced by creating peer support group networks, allowing them to share experiences, best approaches, and evidence-based practices. Secondly, parents' participation and engagement can be improved by facilitating multilingual communication and providing them with information about ECEC programs, events, and activities in multiple languages. This can be achieved through hosting culturally inclusive events or establishing parent advisory boards on multiculturalism. Lastly, the national ECEC curriculum should be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect diverse cultural components, traditions, and values. This can be done by monitoring and evaluating multicultural practices in ECEC settings, using feedback from educators and parents. A clear policy and support system will help in updating and reinforcing policies towards giving more importance to multicultural education, precise guidelines, and good funding allocation to support the implementation of ECEC more successfully.

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